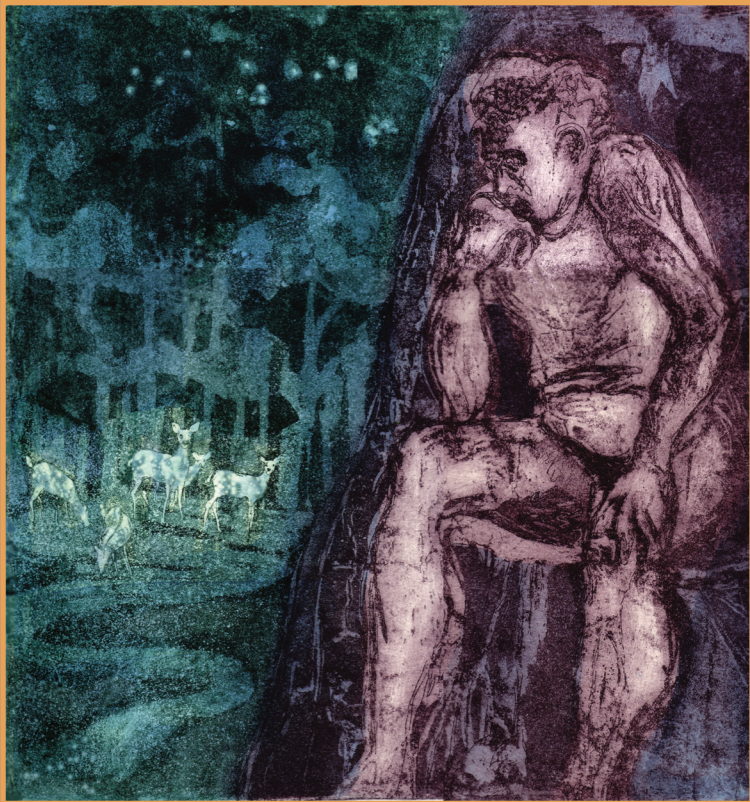


# THE PSYCHOANALYTICAL PROCESS



DONALD MELTZER

The Harris Meltzer Trust

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PSYCHOANALYTICAL  
PROCESS



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# CONTENTS

<i>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</i>	vii
<i>FOREWORD</i> by Meg Harris Williams	ix
<i>AUTHOR'S PREFACE</i>	xiii
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	xix
I	
THE PHASES OF THE ANALYTIC PROCESS	
<b>1</b> The gathering of the transference	1
<b>2</b> The sorting of geographical confusions	15
<b>3</b> The sorting of zonal confusions	25
<b>4</b> The threshold of the depressive position	35
<b>5</b> The weaning process	47
II	
THE ANALYST'S TASK AND FUNCTIONS	
<b>6</b> The process with adult patients	57
<b>7</b> The cycle of the process in the individual sessions	71
<b>8</b> The analytical work	83
<b>9</b> Psychoanalysis as a human activity	97
<i>APPENDICES A–L</i>	101
<i>REFERENCES</i>	113
<i>INDEX</i>	115

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Donald Meltzer** (1923–2004) was born in New York and studied medicine at Yale. After practising as a psychiatrist specialising in children and families, he moved to England to have analysis with Melanie Klein in the 1950s, and for some years was a training analyst with the British Society. He worked with both adults and children, and was innovative in the treatment of autistic children; in the treatment of children he worked closely with Esther Bick and Martha Harris whom he later married. He taught child psychiatry and psychoanalytic history at the Tavistock Clinic. He also took a special scholarly interest in art and aesthetics, based on a lifelong love of art. Meltzer taught widely and regularly in many countries, in Europe, Scandinavia, and North and South America, and his books have been published in many languages and continue to be increasingly influential in the teaching of psychoanalysis.

His first book, *The Psychoanalytical Process*, was published by Heinemann in 1967 and was received with some suspicion (like all his books) by the psychoanalytic establishment. Subsequent books were published by Clunie Press for the Roland Harris Educational Trust which he set up together with Martha Harris

(now the Harris Meltzer Trust). The *Process* was followed by *Sexual States of Mind* in 1973, *Explorations in Autism* in 1975 (with contributions from John Bremner, Shirley Hoxter, Doreen Weddell and Isca Wittenberg); *The Kleinian Development* in 1978 (his lectures on Freud, Klein and Bion given to students at the Tavistock); *Dream Life* in 1984; *The Apprehension of Beauty* in 1988 (with Meg Harris Williams); and *The Claustrium* in 1992. *The Educational Role of the Family: A Psychoanalytical Model* (commissioned for the OECD with Martha Harris) and first published in French in 1976; a new English edition was published in 2013. As a result of his worldwide teaching several compilations exist of his supervision seminars, including *Meltzer in Barcelona* (2002), *Meltzer in Venice* (2016), *Meltzer in Sao Paulo* (2017), and *Meltzer in Paris* (2017). Other accounts by some who use his work in their own teaching practice are in *Teaching Meltzer* (2015). An introductory selection from his writings may be found in *A Meltzer Reader* (2012) and sample papers on the HMT website [www.harris-meltzer-trust.org.uk](http://www.harris-meltzer-trust.org.uk).

## FOREWORD

The great originality of this book derives from Meltzer's view of psychoanalysis as a process with a natural history, following in logical order a number of developmental phases specific to the transference relationship: from establishing the object-relation, through the sorting of geographic and zonal confusions, to weaning and independence. These phases are patterned according to the evolution of primitive object relationships, and, it is implied, to the process of learning to think; and they recur over the four cyclical time units of an analysis: the session, the week, the term, the year.

The goal of an analysis is to establish the patient's capacity for self-analysis, as 'a corollary to accepting responsibility for psychic reality', which Meltzer relates to Freud's 'decision to relinquish resistances', as distinct from undoing repressions which is a goal of the infant self. The experiences of alternate relief and shock set in motion by the analytic process constitute its 'wave-form', over which the analyst's task is to 'preside'. This 'presiding' entails an accompanying self-analytic soul-searching on the part of the analyst, whether he is still in analysis himself or not; for unlike other sciences, Meltzer says, psychoanalysis cannot be didactically taught (or not solely), but requires each individual analyst

to 'discover' it, by means of self-discovery and the weathering of infantile turbulence. 'It is in the repeated rhythmic experience of destruction and restoration, despair and hope, pain and joy, that the experience of gratitude arises and love and concern for good objects.' This applies not only to the patient but to the analyst in his love affair with the psychoanalytic method.

Meltzer makes it clear that it is impossible to discuss method without clarifying one's conception of the mental apparatus, the way the mind works; in particular the problem of which part of the mind is in control of the organ of consciousness. He details the various pseudo-analytic stances or false identities deriving from projective identification rather than introjection of an inspirational combined object; distinguishing these from the preformed transference which has to be shed before a real analysis can actually begin, and which occurs in different ways in both adults and children.

Indeed in this, his first book, it is possible to see the germ of many concepts elaborated in further work (his own and others'); some of which are adumbrated in a series of short appendices. Thus there are comments on Bion's  $Ps \leftrightarrow D$  oscillation and its role in integration (distinguishing between splitting-and-disintegration) and on Bick's concept of failure of psychic skin (related to Meltzer's findings of autistic children's failure to establish an internal psychic space); and there is emphasis at key points on aesthetic experience, especially on the threshold of the depressive position (whether this be a moment in the session, or the culmination of the analysis).

Meltzer distinguishes the various functions of interpretation, in maintaining the analytic setting, enabling new 'equipment' in the patient's internal objects, and in helping the analyst in his struggle to preserve the 'analytic attitude'. In psychoanalysis, by contrast with the medical model of 'doing no harm', therapeutic zeal indicates the presence of the megalomania that he later calls 'retreat from aesthetic conflict' – the psychoanalytic process itself being the aesthetic object. Instead, scientific curiosity and devotion to method must be relied upon to sustain the emotional stress of 'psychoanalysis as a human activity', with the reward of continuing self-discovery that comes essentially from hard work rather than from either talent or authority.

Finally, to return to the originality of the book: at this distance in time, it is interesting to note Meltzer's forthright *apologia* for his (extended) use of the traditional Kleinian language of part-objects which has since been abandoned by many. He always maintained that he continued to use this terminology since it described what he saw daily in his patients' material, that is, what was actually going on in their phantasy lives. In this book it is clear how the mirroring of adult and infantile modes of being that derived from his extensive experience with both children and adults (in his own practice and in supervision) fortified his understanding of mental structures. In a sense his originality lies in its roots in orthodoxy, in effect, faithfulness to his own living analysis with Mrs Klein (regardless of theoretical disagreements that he later imagined may have arisen).

Above all – applying his own distinction between the modulation and the modification of anxiety – this book is a *vademecum* for the young practising analyst, enabling him (or her) to retain and strengthen their interest in the work despite the trials and disappointments that inevitably arise in individual analyses; Meltzer's emphasis is on making the most, not of 'a bad job' as Bion put it, but of 'the time of your life' – the awareness of time's passing that shapes all aesthetic experience.

Meg Harris Williams  
(editor)



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Over the past six years, through lectures and seminars, this book has grown to its present form in the milieu of close cooperation in clinical work and research. Most of its form comes from the author but much of its richness from the students and colleagues with whom it has been 'worked through'. It began shortly before Melanie Klein's death in 1960, as a series of lecture-seminars to child psychotherapists who had been trained at the Tavistock Clinic. In these sessions material was presented selected by therapists who were having supervision with the author. These presentations were preceded by a 20 minute off-the-cuff lecture on the analytical process, and the nosology and prognosis to be illustrated by the case presentation. These lectures were recorded, mimeographed and distributed.

This method was repeated over those six years with different groups: student psychotherapists, students of child analysis, the analysts and students of the Argentinian Psychoanalytical Society and finally with a research seminar of student and graduate child analysts. It was possible to operate in this way because of a wide supervision experience, from which timely

case material could be drawn. It has been through the abundance of supervision of child and adult cases juxtaposed to the work with my own patients that awareness of the patterns described in the book arose. Publication has come as the logical step after conviction.

I mention these facts to locate the experience here embodied within the framework of psychoanalytical history, to show that a group is at work expanding the theory and practice of developments begun by Melanie Klein. Consequently this book cannot be fruitfully read without reference to this historical context, a minimum requirement being Hanna Segal's (1964) *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. It is difficult to imagine that the present book could on the other hand have significance for anyone who has not experienced the analytical process at first hand as a patient. It is intended for the use of practising analysts and as a contribution to a new and widespread interest in the analytical process.

With regard to terminology, most technical terms employed are well known in the Kleinian literature, such as splitting, splitting-and-idealisation, projective identification, internal objects, etc. But others will be less familiar, although they have become common parlance amongst Kleinian analysts. They are largely notational, a style of reference, rather than technical. Their meaning does not involve any increment to theory, but is evident from their context. I refer to such terms as 'toilet-breast', 'toilet-mummy', 'feeding-breast', 'little-boy part' (of the self), etc. It is a shorthand for structural reference and its general principles are simple: (1) adult or infantile names are given to objects as they refer to the experience of adult or infantile levels of the personality – cf. 'mother' or 'mummy'; (2) objects are named as indication of part- or whole-object status – cf. 'mummy' or 'breast'; parts of the self are named to distinguish their level of maturity and leading quality, so as to define the degree of splitting – cf. the 'man', the 'little-boy-part', the 'baby penis'.

A similar notation indicates the geographical distribution in phantasy, where 'internal' and 'external' are used to describe inner and outer worlds, while 'inside' and 'outside' are used to define the relationship to the inside or outside of the body of an object.